

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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Established 1991

23 March 2005

Dr Hanna Jaireth
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Dr Jaireth

**Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 244 – Duffy part Block 2 Section 56
Stromlo Village Settlement (DV244)**

Thank you for your letter of 7 March 2005 inviting the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) to participate in the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment Inquiry into DV244.

The Weston Creek community has always supported the rebuilding of the seventeen ACT Housing properties within Stromlo Village which were destroyed in the 18 January 2003 bushfires.

The Weston Creek community does not generally support the expansion of the Stromlo Village from 20 residences to 40 residences.

A submission outlining the views of the Weston Creek community which have been made known to the WCCC is attached for the consideration of the Standing Committee.

Members of the WCCC Committee are available to discuss any of the issues raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Jeff Carl
Chairperson,
Weston Creek Community Council

Submission of the Weston Creek Community Council
on
Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 244 – Duffy part Block 2
Section 56 Stromlo Village Settlement (DV244)

1. The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) has been actively involved in Weston Creek as a consultation conduit for the local community since 1991. Over the past 26 months we have discussed issues surrounding the recovery and rebuilding of Weston Creek after the 18 January 2003 firestorms. Mr Sandy Hollway, Chair of the "Shaping our Territory" Working Group and Ms Jocelyn Plovitts from the same Working Group have attended and addressed several open public meetings of the WCCC which discussed the rebuilding of Stromlo Village and DV244. One of these meetings was the March 2004 meeting and copies of the Minutes for this meeting are available on our website (www.wccc.com.au).
2. The Weston Creek community has always supported the rebuilding of the seventeen ACT Housing properties within Stromlo Village which were destroyed in the 18 January 2003 bushfires.
3. The WCCC is aware that the "*Committee is very mindful that displaced residents wish to return to Stromlo at the earliest opportunity, and has therefore shortened the usual six-week consultation period*". However, the WCCC does not agree that the present situation with the displaced residents warrants a shortening of the usual six-week consultation period to less than three weeks! The few weeks that are saved are of little consequence considering that it is over two years since the bushfires destroyed the residents' homes and it is doubtful that the residents will be able to move into any rebuilt properties prior to the third anniversary of the bushfires.
4. Furthermore, the WCCC and the Weston Creek community respectfully contend that there has been no physical, fiscal, planning nor statutory restriction on the ACT Government that would have prevented a quick rebuilding of the seventeen ACT Housing properties within Stromlo Village which were destroyed in the January 2003 bushfires. The National Capital Authority (NCA) has had no role to play in approving the plans for Stromlo Village as the area is already zoned for residential use within the National Capital Plan. Rather, the community believes that the ACT Government has been proceeding very slowly on this issue by making the rebuilding of Stromlo Village conditional on the successful resolution of the significant expansion plans for the Stromlo and Uriarra Villages, as well as the proposed expansion of the Pierces Creek settlement.
5. The Weston Creek community has become quite cynical with the repeated shortcomings in the public consultation processes that have accompanied the "Shaping our Territory" project, these processes often ignoring the practices contained in the Government's own public consultation manual. Over the last twenty months, these shortcomings have included;
 - Much reduced public consultation timelines;
 - Consultation periods that commence in or include school holiday periods; and
 - Refusal to release pertinent documents such as the Urban Edge Study.

6. The Weston Creek community does not believe that it should be disadvantaged by having its consultation period shortened due to the ACT Government's tardiness in rebuilding its own properties.
7. The WCCC acknowledges that the pre-bushfire residents of Stromlo village have repeatedly stated that they were concerned that the expansion of Stromlo would irreversibly change its character. The WCCC also understands that the pre-bushfire residents do not think that they needed to be bigger in order to survive because of their proximity to Duffy and the Duffy shops (see for example, the last two paragraphs on page 24 of the *Sustainability Study: Stromlo Settlement, May 2004*). Whilst the pre-bushfire residents now appear to accept that the village will be expanded, the Weston Creek community are concerned that this agreement results from duress and is predicated on the basis of a "take-it-or-leave-it" offer from the ACT Government.
8. The Committee of the WCCC has established through talking to Weston Creek residents during visits to local shopping centres and discussions at our public meetings that the Weston Creek community does not generally support the expansion of the Stromlo Village from 20 residences to 40 residences. Rather the community, and especially the nearby residents of Duffy, generally believe that the Government is being opportunistic and is expanding the Stromlo Village in order to generate income that, if not for the bushfires, would not have otherwise been available.
9. The Weston Creek community is also concerned that the ACT Government has approached the rebuilding of Stromlo Village from a purely fiscal point of view, and has paid scant regard to the social and emotional needs of the pre-bushfire residents. This view is supported in the *Sustainability Study: Stromlo Settlement* where at the bottom of page 35, there is an acceptance that the Government will have to appoint a part-time community development worker for up to five years in order to support community development in the expanded village. It is doubtful that there would be a need for such a worker if the original village was rebuilt.
10. Residents of Weston Creek do not accept the reasoning that Stromlo Village has to be expanded to forty residences so that there will not be an enclave of purely public housing that can lead to socially undesirable outcomes (see the top of page 10 of *Sustainability Study: Stromlo Settlement*). Mixed communities of public and private housing as described in DV244 have not been proved to work in practice and the community is not convinced that it will work in Stromlo Village. With just twenty public housing residences, Stromlo Village is no where near the scale of a Burnie Court or a Strathgordon Court and the Tanjil Loop development near Duffy shops is a comparable development to Stromlo Village. In Tanjil Loop, ACT Housing has no qualms about rebuilding a small public housing estate that will have about twelve public housing residences and is located in very close proximity to more public housing in Glenmaggie Street. Furthermore, the ACT Government had no reservations with the Defence Housing Authority constructing an enclave of fifty defence-force residences in Stirling in 2001 and Canberra has many aged-care facilities with over fifty residences – some of these are located in Weston Creek in Waramanga, Weston, Stirling and Fisher.

11. Section 2.9 of DV244 includes a dot-point that states that a key benefit of the expanded village option is "providing a lifestyle option that had not been previously available elsewhere in the ACT". This dot-point has been consistently interpreted throughout DV244 (and its supporting documentation comprising the *Sustainability Study: Stromlo Settlement* and the *Stromlo Village Preliminary Assessment, June 2004*) as offering a rural lifestyle to the residents of the additional twenty residences. This is an idyllic perception that is not sustained by the post-bushfire reality. Prior to the 2003 bushfires, the village was visually shielded from Duffy by an extensive stand of mature radiata pine trees. These trees have now all been removed and it will take a decade or more to restore substantive visual shielding to a level comparable to that existing before the bushfires.
12. Also impacting on the visual shielding is the relocation of the village about 100m to the east towards Streeton Drive in order to contain the village entirely on ACT-administered land. The end result of this shift is that the houses will be more visually exposed since they have effectively been moved over a small ridge that runs across the site. This move will negatively impact on the visual amenity of the whole site when viewed from Weston and other points east of the site.
13. Stromlo Village differs from the other former forestry settlements of Uriarra Village and Pierces Creek settlement in that it is located within the boundary of urban Canberra rather than existing as a separate rural area. Suburban Duffy is a mere 200m to the south of the village and includes a primary school and shops. An ACTION bus stop is also in close proximity to the village.
14. Prior to the January 2003 bushfires, the twenty houses in the village were sited on blocks ranging from about 1,200m² to 1,500m² and each of the houses was around 110m² to 120m² in floor area. Reticulated sewer, water supply and electrical services, to urban standards, were available to each house. The village therefore had a unique character of small houses on large blocks.
15. Section 3.2.2 of DV244 states that block sizes in the expanded "village" will range from 1,000m² to 2,500m² and the maximum plot ratio will be 0.35:1. The WCCC understands that the rebuilt ACT Housing properties will be 120m² to 150m² in floor area which is reasonably consistent with maintaining the original character of the village. However, DV244 will allow houses of at least 350m² in floor area to be built within the village, and if the experience of the rebuilt areas in Weston Creek is used as a guide, about 50 percent of the non-ACT Housing properties will be 350m² to 450m² in floor area. It is hard to conceive how residences this large will allow the rebuilt, expanded "village" be compatible with the pre-existing rural landscape character as specified in DV244 (see the second dot-point under 'Heritage' on page 17). Indeed, the expanded "village" will appear as an extension of Duffy and it is unlikely to provide a lifestyle option that had not been previously available elsewhere in the ACT.
16. This disparity in respective housing sizes between public and private houses also has the potential for creating an "us-and-them" attitude within the "village" between the residents of the ultra-large, executive houses and the tenants of the much smaller ACT Housing properties.

17. The Weston Creek community agrees with a finding of the ACT Planning and Land Council that the rebuilt Stromlo Village is likely to be seen as a privileged community surrounded by Duffy, Holder and Molonglo (see Section 2.13 at the top of page 14 of DV244). The existence of such a privileged community is again inconsistent with the stated aim of maintaining the original 'character' of Stromlo Village which was predominantly 'blue-collar, working class'.

18. Notwithstanding the foregoing comments, if the ACT Government is determined to expand Stromlo "Village" despite community objections, the Weston Creek community strongly requests that single-storey residences no larger than 250m² be allowed in the rebuilt "village" in order to maintain as far as possible the pre-existing rural landscape character. The construction of smaller residences will also assist in avoiding the visual appearance of a continuous façade of building on the crest of a rise where the topography of the site slopes down towards Holder.

Weston Creek Community Council
23 March 2005